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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Come, mighty King, robed in majesty. Your throne stands firm, even in the midst of chaos. You speak, and it is done.

Lord, You are our strength and shield. Our protection comes from You. Today, guide our Senators as a shepherd would lead the lambs. May our lawmakers find in You green pastures and still waters.

Lord, support us with Your powerful hands until the shadows flee away. Forgive all our sins and rebellion, empowering us to glorify Your Name in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 1 minute as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REMEMBERING HAROLD KELLER

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, recent research by historians has identified a person participating in the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima.

That iconic photograph of marines raising the American flag at Iwo Jima is a testament to American strength and sacrifice.

The Marine Corps has identified another one of the marines pictured in this photograph as Cpl Harold Keller of Brooklyn, IA.

Keller never sought recognition or fame. He never mentioned to his children that he had helped raise that flag. He died in 1979, so he doesn't know we now know it is he in the photograph.

Seventy-four years later, I am proud that this Iowan is finally recognized for his role in making history.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, later today, the Senate will vote on finally getting the appropriations process moving. We will vote on considering a package of domestic funding bills, and if we take up the legislation, I intend to stay on it until we complete it.

On both sides of the Capitol, our Democratic colleagues have spent recent weeks insisting over and over that their 3-year-old quest to impeach the President will not prevent them from the substantive work American families need us to tackle. So far, the early returns haven't been too encouraging.

A few weeks ago, we saw the unusual spectacle of Senate Democrats voting to filibuster defense funding due to political fights with the White House.

Democrats blocked a pay raise for our servicemembers because they would rather fight with the President.

We know that across the Capitol, for months now, Speaker PELOSI has been blocking the USMCA and blocking the 176,000 new American jobs it would create.

This week offers another test. Soon we will be voting on appropriations, and we will see whether our Democratic friends really can put aside their impeachment obsession long enough to get some real work done on the side. Actions speak louder than words.

First, I hope we will tackle a package of domestic funding bills. After that, we will turn to a defense vehicle. I urge our Democratic colleagues to drop the stall tactics that have left funding for our Armed Forces in limbo and join with Republicans to deliver the funding our military commanders need to keep us safe.

TURKEY AND SYRIA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, I opposed President Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria so I am encouraged by press reports that his administration is considering retaining a military presence in that country to keep the pressure on ISIS.

Since September 11, our Nation has learned several key lessons about the fight against radical Islamic terrorism.

The terrorist threat cannot be wished away. The terrorists mean us harm, and we cannot allow them to establish safe havens and solidify their networks. When they do, the bloodshed ends up right here on our shores.

American leadership is essential. We have seen our partners and allies step up and take on important roles. In fact, as we speak, France is playing a leading role in the African Sahel, but just about every place President Obama tried to "lead from behind" provides tragic reminders that there are

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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certain kinds of leadership only America can contribute.

Fortunately, we are not in this alone. The huge progress we have won in recent years against ISIS and the Taliban has come by partnering with local forces, with support from a broad international coalition. America has only provided limited specialized capabilities to reinforce the local partners that do the heaviest lifting. This approach is sustainable.

Unfortunately, we know exactly what happens when America forgets these lessons and simply decides we are tired of sustaining the fight. Abandoning Afghanistan in the 1990s helped create the conditions for al-Qaida's ability to grow and plan the September 11 attacks from a safe haven far from our shores. President Obama's retreat from Iraq allowed ISIS to rise from the still-warm ashes of al-Qaida in Iraq.

If not arrested, withdrawing from Syria will invite more of the chaos that breeds terrorism and creates a vacuum our adversaries will certainly fill.

It will invite the brutal Assad regime to reassert its oppressive control over northeastern Syria, repressing Sunni Arab communities and creating the same conditions that led to ISIS's growth in the first place.

Russia will gain more leverage to amass power and influence throughout the Middle East, project power into the Mediterranean, and even promote its interests in Africa.

Iran-backed forces could have access to a strategic corridor that runs all the way from Tehran to the very doorstep of Israel.

So where do we go from here? Many of us in the Senate were ahead of the game on the need to reaffirm American global leadership in the ongoing fight against radical terror. At the beginning of this year, a bipartisan supermajority of Senators warned about exactly this course of events. The McConnell amendment to S. 1 earned 70 votes back in February. We specifically warned against a precipitous withdrawal from either Afghanistan or Syria and noted the need for an American presence. Congress should affirm—actually, reaffirm—the same truths today, and we should do so strongly.

Unfortunately, the resolution crafted by House Democrats is simply not sufficient. It is not so much wrong as it is badly insufficient. It focuses solely on the Kurds, ignoring the critical Sunni-Arab community that suffered under both Assad's regime and ISIS and vulnerable minority communities like the Christian Arabs of Syria. The House was silent on the key matter of maintaining an actual physical U.S. military presence in Syria.

Perhaps the goal was to paper over disagreements within the Democratic Party. After all, our colleague, the senior Senator from Massachusetts, recently told a national television audience—this is the senior Senator from Massachusetts—"I think that we ought

to get out of the Middle East." "I think we ought to get out of the Middle East," said the senior Senator from Massachusetts, and almost all of our Democratic colleagues currently running for President refused to sign on to the McConnell amendment that earned 70 votes earlier this year.

We can't afford to dance around the critical question of a U.S. presence in Syria and the Middle East for the sake of Democratic Presidential primary politics. The Senate needs to speak up. We cannot effectively support our partners on the ground without a military presence. Senators who thought we should withdraw from Syria and Afghanistan in February do not get to criticize President Trump for withdrawing from Syria today unless they go on the record, admit they changed their minds, and say it is too dangerous to quit.

So, today, along with Chairman INHOFE, Chairman RISCH, Chairman BURR, and Senator GRAHAM, I am introducing a stronger resolution that acknowledges hard truths and focuses on our strategic interests in the Middle East.

Our resolution acknowledges the vital role our Kurdish and Arab Syrian partners have played in rooting out and destroying the ISIS caliphate. It condemns Turkey's decision to escalate hostilities in Syria, warns against the abandonment of our allies and partners in Syria, and urges President Trump to rethink his invitation for President Erdogan to visit the White House.

It also acknowledges Turkey's legitimate national security concerns emanating from the conflict in Syria and the significant risks to the United States if such a strategically consequential ally were to fall further into Moscow's orbit. It recognizes the grave consequences of U.S. withdrawal: the rising influence of Russia, Iran, and the Assad regime and the escape of more than 100 ISIS-affiliated fighters detained in the region.

We specifically urge the President to end—the drawdown, something that, fortunately, appears to be underway. We urge a reengagement with our partners in this region. We highlight the need for international diplomatic efforts to end the underlying civil wars in Syria and Afghanistan on terms that address the conditions that have allowed al-Qaida and ISIS to thrive. We cannot repeat this mistake in Afghanistan.

I am aware there is some appetite on both sides of the aisle to quickly reach for the toolbox of sanctions. I myself played a critical role in creating sanction regimes in the past, but I caution us against developing a reflex to use sanctions as our tool of first, last, and only resort in implementing our foreign policy. Sanctions may play an important role in this process, and I am open to the Senate considering them, but we need to think extremely carefully before we employ the same tools

against a democratic NATO ally that we would against the worst rogue state.

Do we know what political impacts such sanctions will have inside Turkey? Will they weaken President Erdogan or rally the country to his cause? Do we know the impact sanctions will have on U.S. companies or on the economies of our closest allies that have deeply integrated their economies with Turkey?

If we are going to use sanctions against a democratic ally, we are going to have to be careful. We are going to have to be smart. We are going to have to be thoughtful and deliberate. We don't want to further drive a NATO ally into the arms of the Russians.

Serious conversations about the use of sanctions must involve our colleagues on the Foreign Relations, Banking, and Finance Committees to ensure that this tool is used correctly.

The most important thing the Senate can do right now is speak clearly and reaffirm the core principles that unite most of us, Republicans and Democrats, about the proper role for American leadership in Syria, in the Middle East, and, for that matter, in the world.

We hope the damage in Syria can be undone, but perhaps, even more importantly, we absolutely must take steps so the same mistakes—the same mistakes are not repeated in Iraq or Afghanistan.

I feel confident that my resolution is a strong and sorely needed step. I feel confident my colleagues will agree, and I urge them to join me.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

PROTOCOL TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY OF 1949 ON THE ACCESSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following treaty, which the clerk will state.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Calendar No. 5, Treaty document No. 116-1, Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 on the Accession of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Pending:

McConnell amendment No. 946, to change the enactment date.